



The National Archives

The life of a document

The National Archives is home to 1,000 years of government records and information. When carrying out research, it's helpful to remember that when these records were created they were working documents created for specific purposes.

For example, the Admiralty required navy ships to keep logs of voyages. A nineteenth century ship's log was compiled by the ship's captain or master, and contained information about the day-to-day events that happened on the ship. Supplies taken onboard were often recorded; details of the ship's position and course plotted; the weather noted; and the punishment of crew documented.

Surviving logs were passed to the Admiralty where they could be consulted and studied for information on things like tides and currents. These logs are now stored at The National Archives.

The logs have been bound, catalogued, put in boxes, labelled and carefully stored so that they can be identified and retrieved for researchers to use. Electronic copying and good conservation will ensure that these documents remain accessible for hundreds of years to come.

These ships' logs now provide unique and important information for research on many different subjects: food supplies taken onboard - important to nutritionists investigating diet and health; ships' movements and courses - fascinating to naval historians; weather information - for meteorologists researching climate change; and the life of people onboard - important to family history researchers.

As well as ships' logs, many other documents held by The National Archives contain fragments of useful information. By digging around in these original sources, created for reasons very different from your research, you can find all sorts of surprising and interesting information.